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ABSTRACT

By reviewing personal correspondence, biographies, newspaper coverage of the 1940s, and interviews, this survey examines Wendell Willkie's relations with the press in general and with publishers John Cowles and Gardner (Mike) Cowles in particular. Divided into four parts, the survey begins with a review of the correspondence between Willkie and such journalists as Marquis Childs, Drew Pearson, and Arthur Krock, illuminating relationships between the press and public figures in the 1940s. The second section focuses primarily on the relations between Willkie and the Cowles brothers in their efforts to win for Willkie the Republican nomination and the presidency in 1940 and the nomination again in 1944. In this context, consideration is given to how the Cowles brothers managed their potentially conflicting roles as publishers and would-be president makers. Part 3 considers the 1942 "One World" trip--the 49-day around-the-world diplomatic tour that Willkie took with Mike Cowles--further examining how Cowles handled the often simultaneous roles as journalist, government official, and close friend and supporter of a presidential candidate. Finally, the fourth section provides discussion, conclusions, and recommendations for future research in this area. (A list of 123 footnotes is appended.) (MM)

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Newspaper Division

COMPATRIOTS: Wendell Willkie, the Press, and the Cowles Brothers,

An introductory survey, including Willkie's "One World" trip with Publisher Gardner (Mike) Cowles

By

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A paper presented to the Newspaper Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication at the AEJMC annual convention in Portland, Oregon, July 1988.

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Abstract

Wendell Willkie's relations with the press in general and with Publishers John Cowles and Gardner (Mike) Cowles in particular are surveyed in the light of their correspondence and correspondence of Willkie with other journalists--much of it previously unpublished. Biographies, newspaper coverage of the 1940s, and interviews complete the picture of a time when the press was less introspective, and a utilities-company lawyer from Indiana became a political leader, when he and the press discovered one another.

This survey is in four parts: Part I reviews correspondence between Willkie and such journalists as Marquis Childs, Drew Pearson and Arthur Krock to help describe relationships between the press and public figures in the 1940s; Part I also discusses the rapport Willkie had with news reporters, editors and publishers; Part II focuses primarily on the relations between Willkie and the Cowles brothers in their efforts to win the GOP nomination and the presidency in 1940 and the nomination again in 1944; in this context, consideration is given to how the Cowleses managed their potentially conflicting roles as publishers and would-be President makers; Part III reviews the "One World" trip that Willkie took with Mike Cowles in 1942, to further consider how Mike Cowles handled often simultaneous roles as journalist, government official, and close friend and supporter of a presidential candidate; Part IV provides a section for discussion, conclusions and recommendations for future research.

Conclusions include:

Willkie's career provides insight to the press of the 1940s as well as to contemporary issues of reporter-news source relations and news coverage of the private lives of public officials. Introspection may be a matter of overkill in the 1980s; it was not on the agenda in the 1940s.

The Cowles reputation for unfettered newsrooms generally was deserved, perhaps because of the people attracted to such an environment.

Mike seemed the closer Willkie friend, while John seemed more the political adviser.

The way the press ignored Willkie's private life is questioned.

Recommendations for further or continuing research include a content analysis of the flagship Cowles papers in Minneapolis and Des Moines to assess coverage of Willkie with coverage of his competitors; a study of the rearing of publishers-to-be; and, a study of press-politician correspondence available, for example, in presidential libraries to assess to what extent journalists involved themselves in government policy making.

COMPATRIOTS: Wendell Willkie, the Press, and the Cowles Brothers,
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INTRODUCTION

This paper is an early step in research dealing with Wendell L. Willkie and the Press, with particular emphasis on Willkie's relations with John and Gardner (Mike) Cowles, publishers of the **Minneapolis Star-Journal, Minneapolis Tribune, The Des Moines Register, Des Moines Tribune,** and **LOOK** magazine. The Cowles brothers were deeply involved in Willkie's successful quest for the Republican Party's presidential nomination in 1940, his subsequent loss to President Roosevelt, and then his bid for the GOP nomination in 1944. Their roles in Willkie's career were particularly important in the wake of his 1940 loss to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, since the brothers assumed more leadership in efforts to get Willkie the 1944 nomination, and their friendships with him deepened as a matter of time. During such political involvement, the Cowles brothers also directed newspapers with a reputations for responsible and innovative journalism and for newsrooms unfettered by the influence of publishers or business pressures.

Study of the Cowles brothers and Willkie is timely and should be instructive for a number of reasons: the direct involvement of publishers, editors, columnists, reporters and other journalists in the political process is a continuing topic of interest in American journalism; recent emphasis on the private lives of public officials is placed in historical context when considering the political career of Wendell L. Willkie and the extent to which the press ignored his private life; the contribution of the Cowles family to Midwest and American journalism are well worth discussing and documenting; study of the Willkie years should also provide perspective on the Cowles papers' reputations for unfettered

news coverage; an excellent and relatively recent Willkie biography, **Dark Horse,** by Steve Neal (Doubleday & Company, Garden City, New York, 1984), provides background on Willkie; correspondence between Willkie and the Cowles brothers, and between Willkie and other news professionals is now available at the Lilly Library at Indiana University; Mike Cowles' papers recently were donated to the Cowles Library at Drake University and are being organized. The Willkie and Mike Cowles material includes previously unpublished correspondence that sheds light on politics and the press in the 1940s. Other reasons for study are that the papers of John Cowles also will be available soon; persons with first-hand experience in news coverage of Willkie and the Cowles brothers are now in their 70s and 80s and are a scarce resource. Finally, there has been little published research on Willkie and the press, except as related to the Willkie biographies. A survey of **Journalism Quarterly,** yielded only one Willkie-Press article, published in June 1941, "Willkie Received Unparalleled Newspaper Circulation Support"--a study of newspaper editorial support of Willkie and President Roosevelt in the 1940 election, based on number of newspapers and their circulations.

This survey is in four parts: Part I reviews correspondence between Willkie and such journalists as Marquis Childs, Drew Pearson and Arthur Krock to help describe relationships between the press and public figures in the 1940s; Part I also discusses the rapport Willkie had with news reporters, editors and publishers; Part II focuses primarily on the relations between Willkie and the Cowles brothers in their efforts to win the GOP nomination and the presidency in 1940 and the nomination again in 1944; in this context, consideration is given to how the Cowleses managed their potentially conflicting roles as publishers and would-be President makers ; Part III reviews the "One World" trip that Willkie took with Mike Cowles in 1942, to further consider how Mike Cowles handled roles as journalist, government official, and close friend and supporter of a presidential candidate; Part IV provides a discussion, conclusions and recommendations for future research.

PART I Compatriots: Willkie and the Press

"Things were different then." Those four words mark much of the research one does on the press and public figures in the 1940s. It is not so much that journalists and public figures shared secrets and advice--they still do today. The "difference," in part, is how much the advice and secrets, the companionship with one another, were routine. That was the context for the close personal ties that Publishers John and Gardner (Mike) Cowles established with Wendell Willkie, and it is illustrated well by correspondence between Willkie and several journalists.

Marquis Childs

Marquis Childs, a reporter for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, received a Pulitzer Prize in 1970 in recognition of his political reporting and commentary. But in November 1941, he had a problem. So, Childs wrote to Wendell L. Willkie, who had lost the presidential election the year before, and was a likely GOP candidate for 1944.

> Dear Mr. Willkie:
>
> In our talks sometime ago you told me about the remarkable writing offers that you have had since the campaign, some of which you have accepted. I recall particularly the offer from Readers' Digest of eight thousand an article for 5 articles a year; also the Collier offer of fifty thousand a year for a contract under which you would write ten articles, but six would fulfill the contract. I have been thinking about this and, as I recall it, this far exceeds the price paid to Calvin Coolidge after he was President.
>
> Would you have any objection to my making a story of this? I would carry this without attribution to you so that there would be no impression that you were giving out this remarkable story.[1]

(In his response a week later, Willkie said he didn't know whether the article was appropriate, and that he'd "like to have a long talk" with Childs. Apparently, the article was not written).

Childs' letter is interesting because of the deference of a journalist to a public figure--in contrast to much of the reporting of the 1970s and 1980s--and because the letter reflects the affection as well as the deference, of journalists for Willkie in the early 1940s.

Drew Pearson

Columnist Drew Pearson hoped that Republican Willkie might run for President in 1944 with the endorsement of Democratic incumbent Franklin D. Roosevelt.[2] Later, Pearson held out the prospect that FDR and Willkie might run on the same ticket.[3] In a July 1943, letter, Pearson cautioned "Wendell" not to risk Roosevelt's '44 support by attacking FDR's domestic policies:

> ...I am not speaking merely from guesswork when I say that some of the President's friends hope that no chasm, personal, political or otherwise, may grow between you and him. They hope that friendly relations may continue, and if possible increase. To this end they view with some regret reports that you are going to make some speeches on domestic issues...(M)y personal concern is that you two men, whom I revere most highly, should not be drawn apart. I am fearful...that [Thomas E.] Dewey at the moment is in the lead on the Republican side. Your fairness in supporting the President's foreign policies, unquestionably, has hurt you with old-guard Republican leaders, though I am convinced that it has helped you with people generally, and unquestionably has won you a lot of friends among the Democrats.[4]

Pearson apparently appreciated the awkwardness of his giving such advice to a politician, for he concluded the two-page letter with a mild disclaimer:

> This letter, naturally, is confidential. It is written not as a newspaperman, but as a friend. I do not intend to write anything along these lines. But I do hope that you will think twice before launching a critical campaign against the President's domestic policies for the time being.[5]

Arthur Krock

Pearson's advice was hypothetical and speculative. A few years before, Arthur Krock, **New York Times** Washington correspondent, and Turner Catledge, then the national correspondent, had more practical guidance for Willkie on the eve of the 1940 Republican convention. Dark-horse Willkie was to capture the presidential nomination on

the sixth ballot. In their autobiographies,[6] both men wrote of their late night-early morning session with Willkie on June 23-24, 1940. Krock's account:

> I asked him if he had a floor leader. He didn't seem to know what I meant, and asked in turn if one was needed. Catledge and I, restraining our astonishment,...then explained the duties of a floor leader, and the necessity for one plus a strategy committee...Willkie seemed surprised that so much organization was necessary, interested in the description of its workings and quick to understand them, though he gave the impression the plan was wholly new to him.
>
> "Who would be a good floor leader?" he asked...He seemed to us like a man who had set out on a mule to defeat a German Panzer division, confident of his star, sure that he needed nothing more to rout the mechanized political forces against him.[7] [Harold Stassen became the formal floor leader, replacing Indiana Rep. Charlie Halleck, who had been doing some convention spadework].

Eight days later, Krock wrote a column about the handicaps Willkie faced as the newly crowned GOP nominee. Those handicaps were Willkie's background as a utilities-company executive, the isolationists in the Republican Party, the skepticism of party professionals, and the suggestion that some delegates voted for Willkie under the pressure of hometown bankers and businessmen. Political naivete and inexperience were not listed. There was no mention of Willkie's attendance at the Krock/Catledge school of conventioneering.[8]

Advice and guidance from Krock surfaced again, a few months after Willkie lost the 1940 election and upon Willkie's return from a 15-day trip to England. Willkie had observed the war effort, and his support for Roosevelt's Lend-Lease Act was vital to Congressional approval. In a February 9, 1941 letter, Krock advised Willkie on his upcoming testimony:

> Avoid every aspect of cockiness on the stand. Disclaim any thought of posing as a military expert. Some very smart people will be laying for you. Take one or two fundamental tacks and decline to be diverted to others...
>
> Say you are simply giving your impressions of a brief visit among a people under attack; that you know nothing of military or aviation affairs from the expert viewpoint; that guidance as to these should come from

> experts, and everyone--including the President--should accept the same guidance.[9]

The letter offers other advice, including suggestions that Willkie could advance for changing the wording of HR 1776, the Lend-Lease Act: "I suggest that you then make several concrete proposals on your own, as follows."[10] Krock then offered several "concrete proposals." How closely Willkie followed Krock's advice is evident from a reading of Krock's letter and of Willkie's formal statement to a Senate Committee on Feb. 11, 1941.[11] Willkie's general approach was in step with that recommended in the two paragraphs quoted above.

As Krock advised, "Drop the words 'and for other purposes' from the title of the bill." Willkie testified, "The phrase 'and for other purposes' might be dropped from the title of the bill." Krock advised, "The word 'facility' in Section A-2, could possibly be construed to cover all or any section of industry, including newspapers and the radio. It should be limited in language to what it presumably means," the armament industry.

Willkie testified:

> The word "facility" in Section (A) (2) could possibly, through a strained construction, be construed to cover all or any section of industry, including newspapers and the radio. The word obviously is not used for that purpose, but in order to eliminate fears...

Virtually nothing that Krock suggested in his letter was not incorporated in Willkie's subsequent testimony, and, as indicated above, some Krock advice was incorporated literally, or nearly so. A **New York Times** editorial on Feb. 12 termed Willkie's testimony "eloquent and persuasive." Krock did not comment on Willkie's statement in any of his columns in the week following the testimony.

President Roosevelt plainly appreciated Willkie's role in making the war effort bi-partisan. When an aide made a derogatory comment about Willkie, FDR rebuked him:

> Don't you ever say anything like that around here again. Don't even think it. You of all people ought to know that we might not have had Lend-Lease or Selective Service or a lot of other things if it hadn't been

> for Wendell Willkie. He was a godsend to this country when we needed him most.[12]

Gardner (Mike) Cowles and Roscoe Drummond

At the suggestion of **Des Moines Register** Publisher Gardner (Mike) Cowles, Willkie sought to influence the drafting of the GOP 1944 platform with a series of articles published in papers that included **The Register, The Minneapolis Star-Journal** and **Tribune** (also Cowles papers), the **Boston Herald, New York Herald Tribune, Portland Oregonian, San Francisco Chronicle**[13] and **The New York Times.** Pleased with what he called the "amazing success" of the articles, Willkie wrote to Cowles to thank him:

> You're a grand fellow and a great friend and I want you to know how much I appreciate your friendship and your superior judgment.[14]

Roscoe Drummond, Washington bureau chief for **The Christian Science Monitor,** also advised Willkie on how he might use journalists to influence the platform, even though party regulars had turned a deaf ear.

> The need, as I see it, is to dramatize the policy proposals in your current newspaper series and to get them onto the record of the Resolutions Committee hearings so that correspondents--as I know many who will--can use them as a yardstick by which to measure where the Party and its nominee are standing.
>
> To accomplish this, it seems to me that there would be merit in your preparing a model Republican platform, which would mean taking the principal proposals of your series and drafting them in a series of platform plans. This would make for an effective presentation by correspondents who would give them prominence and would turn them into an identifiable body of Willkie views.
>
> If possible, I should like to see the six editors of the Republican papers who invited you to write this series join in urging you to present them to the Resolutions Committee...
>
> I trust that you will not consider me presumptuous for offering such detailed suggestions; I know that you and others have though of practically all of them already. My only excuse is that I am profoundly interested.[15]

Drummond's suggestions were of little avail to Willkie as the 1944 GOP Chicago convention all but ignored the 1940 nominee. After enough slights, Willkie decided to stay in New York.

Mutual affection

The GOP hierarchy had sent Willkie a discouraging message several months earlier. He was not invited to a September 1943 Republican conference on postwar foreign policy. New York Governor Thomas Dewey was at the Mackinac Island, Mich., retreat, as were U.S. Senator Robert Taft of Ohio, California Governor Earl Warren and U.S. Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg of Michigan. As a consolation, Willkie received a telegram from reporters covering the conference, including Drummond, Catledge, Jeff Brown of the **Providence,** R.I., **Bulletin**, Richard Wilson of **The Des Moines Register** and William Murphy of the **Philadelphia Inquirer:**

> HAVING MISERABLE TIME STOP WISH YOU WERE HERE STOP HAVE JUST ISSUED RINGING STATEMENT UNDER YOUR NAME STOP WILL ISSUE ONE DAILY UNTIL YOU ARRIVE [16]

Handwritten on the telegram in the Lilly Library at Indiana University is Willkie's reminder to "Write Each."

The mutual affection between Willkie and much of the press is noted by Willkie biographers. Joseph Barnes, a close friend, wrote, "Willkie had an almost mesmeric influence over publishers, and as individuals they supported him with much more than normal Republican fervor."[17] Ellsworth Barnard said flatly "...the most powerful agency in Willkie's rocket-like ascent...was the press."[18] Steve Neal, in **Dark Horse**, perhaps the best Willkie biography, noted:

> A major factor in Willkie's durability was his favorable treatment by the press. [Henry] Luce, Krock, the Cowles brothers, and the Reids [Ogden and Helen of the **New York Herald Tribune**] were close personal friends, but it was not just management that had a special affection for Willkie. His popularity extended beyond the corner suites and into the newsrooms. He was always accessible to reporters and paid careful attention to their needs, taking many of them into his confidence with inside political gossip and information. He became a regular source to influential columnists Drew Pearson, Raymond Clapper, Marquis Childs and Roscoe Drummond. Other prominent Republicans were clumsy in their dealings with the press, but Willkie had a magic touch.

> While his cultivation of the press worked to his political benefit, it was not contrived. He genuinely liked reporters and they liked him.[19]

In fact, had he lived well into his 50s, it is likely that Willkie would have been a newspaper publisher, if not president. In early 1944, he failed in a bid to buy the **Indianapolis Star**. That summer he was negotiating to buy the **Chicago Daily News**. The trustees of the estate of owner Frank Knox, who had died in April, were interested in selling the paper to a progressive Republican. Before the deal could be closed, Willkie became ill and died, Sunday, Oct. 8, at the age of 52.[20] He had suffered a heart attack in late August and the years of neglect of his health took their toll. Although in late September physicians had said he would soon be released from the hospital, he suffered a streptococcic throat inflection and his lungs became congested. The evening of Oct. 7, he suffered three more heart attacks, already having suffered more than 10 since being hospitalized. The final heart attack came the morning of Oct. 8.[21]

Willkie: Absent-minded and disorganized

Part of Willkie's appeal to the press had been his candor and openness. Also, while able to inspire audiences, voters and the press with his visions for the nation and for the world, Willkie had very human, almost laughable, frailties--among them, his disorganized nature:

* On his way to the 1940 Republican convention, Willkie forgot to take along any money, and his train fare was paid by several reporters.

* On his way to Elwood, Ind., his hometown, to formally accept the GOP nomination and to kick off the 1940 campaign, Willkie realized he had left his luggage and the large-text version of the talk in a friend's car in Rushville, Ind. The script was rushed to him in time for the talk.[22]

* Ready to give his crucial February 1941 congressional testimony on Lend- Lease, Willkie opened his briefcase and discovered he had left his statement in his hotel room. Testimony was delayed until the text was retrieved.

* Partly at the insistence of reporters, Willkie hired a press secretary, Lamoyne M. Jones, to help coordinate press releases during the 1940 campaign, but when "Lem" joined the Willkie entourage and "saw the appalling conditions that he was expected to correct, he almost quit."[23]

* On his around-the-world trip in 1942, Willkie upset some State Department officials when he left confidential papers in the Iraqi palace in Baghdad.[24]

* After the 1942 trip, Mike Cowles' secretary mailed Willkie's immunization record to his secretary. The logical inference is that Cowles carried the immunization record with him during the trip, fearing that Willkie might lose it.[25]

His disorganization, his ideals and his lifestyle made him a figurative loose cannon on the political deck and gave campaign managers headaches:

* Letters from the Cowles brothers to Willkie before his visits to Minneapolis and Des Moines almost choreograph the visits, listing specific times and places. Before a February 1944 visit to Minneapolis, John Cowles sent Willkie a detailed plan and also sent a carbon to Lem Jones, asking Jones to be sure Willkie (a) read the letter and then (b) read it again to refresh his memory just before getting off the train .[26]

* Of Willkie's extramarital affairs, Mike Cowles said, "He was not at all discreet. I thought it was careless and stupid."[27] Willkie said his private life was his own concern. After the 1940 election, he resumed his love affair with Irita Van Doren, book editor of the **New York Herald Tribune**, and even invited friends and journalists to a dinner at her apartment.[28] The news reporting ethic at that time drew a decided distinction between a public figure's private life and public life, and would not cover the private life unless an indiscretion was so glaring it could not be ignored. In syndicated biographical sketches of Willkie in 1940, Damon Runyon, Walter Kiernan and other journalists provided not the slightest hint of Willkie's affairs. Kiernan wrote:

> His life and career to this day have been open to anyone's inspection. Both have been fine-combed by experts and the worst that has been said of him is "He is a utility man."[29]

* George Mills, who covered the 1940 presidential campaign as an Associated Press reporter in Iowa, recalled that Willkie "was an exciting guy":

> Far too often there'd be a difference between his advance [text] and what he said. We'd have one thing out and he'd come out with a real bombshell on something else. He never reneged on an advance. He'd say that he'd stand by the advance, but it left you wondering where you stood. He always had hard-news stories.[30]

* As a lawyer and a civil libertarian, Willkie agreed to join in a lawsuit on behalf of William Schneiderman, an avowed Communist. Willkie served without compensation, agreeing to take on the case in late 1941 and arguing it twice before the U.S. Supreme Court, once on rehearing. The Court finally ruled for Schneiderman on June 21, 1943. Willkie had accepted the case despite the concerns of supporters that doing so would be politically damaging. On Dec. 3, 1941, he wrote a friend, "I am sure I am right in representing Schneiderman...of all the times when civil liberties should be defended, it is now."[31] And, to Raymond Buell, director of the **Fortune** Roundtable: "The reason I accepted the case was because I thought there was a basic question of civil liberties involved."[32] John Cowles was uneasy, however, and wrote Willkie, saying he hoped that Willkie would not also become involved in a federal lawsuit in Minnesota that might involve a violation of the Alien Registration Act of 1940, commonly known as the Smith Act.[33]

Such advice might by John Cowles might be suspect today, but was not out of line with the context of the 1940s, when reporters sought the permission of public figures to do news stories about them, helped script their testimony before Congress or routinely offered political advice, including how best to use the press. With that setting, this paper now focuses more on the Cowles brothers and their rich, but relatively brief relations with Willkie from April 1940 until his death in October 1944.

PART II Compatriots: Willkie, the Cowleses and the GOP nomination

Despite the disorganization and political risks that were part of Willkie's baggage, author David Halberstam considered Willkie to have been the right man at the right time from a media point of view. He was an ideal candidate for the press, especially for the relatively new craft of photojournalism pioneered in Henry Luce's **Life** and then the Cowleses' **LOOK**:

> Indeed, one of the reasons for Luce's early enthusiasm for Wendell Willkie (not surprisingly, the other early major Republican sponsors of Willkie were the Cowles brothers, who published **LOOK**) was that Willkie too [like President Roosevelt] had a wonderful face for the era of modern photojournalism. He was a Republican who did not look like a Republican, the rarest of things in those days, a Republican with sex appeal.[34]

Also, in the late 1930s and early 1940s, Willkie had written about 30 articles for such magazines as **Atlantic Monthly, Collier's, The Nation, The Nation's Business, The Saturday Evening Post**, and, of course, **Life** and **LOOK**. From 1937 to his death in October 1944, **Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature** lists about 435 articles dealing with Willkie--170 published during April through November of 1940, when Willkie captured the GOP nomination and then lost to FDR's third-term bid. (In subsequent years, **Readers' Guide** references are fairly consistent, 47 in 1941, 64 in 1942, 57 in 1943, and 65 in 1944, including 19 in October, the month of his death).

Willkie first came to widespread press and public notice in the mid-1930s in controversy over the Tennessee Valley Authority. Soon after he became president of Commonwealth and Southern in January 1933, he was a leading spokesman for the utilities industry in its six-year fight against the Roosevelt administration's plan for public power through the Tennessee Valley Authority.

> Though losing his power struggle with the New Deal, Willkie had achieved national stature. Indeed, a few prominent political commentators were already touting him as a presidential dark horse.[35] In a July 1939 **Time** magazine cover article, it was said that he had plenty of fight left in him and happened to be "the only businessman in the U.S. who is ever mentioned as a presidential possibility."[36]

"We the people"

Despite these early mentions, it was Willkie's lengthy "We the People" article in the April 1940 issue of **Fortune**--a Luce publication--that was credited with starting him on the road to the GOP nomination, which he captured in Philadelphia just three months later. Willkie had participated in a **Fortune** discussion group in August 1939. After that first meeting, the magazine's managing editor, Russell Davenport, told his wife, "I've met the man who ought to be the next President of the United States."[37]

The **Fortune** article, subtitled "A foundation for a political platform for recovery," sounded Willkie themes of the next four years:

> You--the politicians of both parties--have muddled our foreign affairs with politics; with vague threats and furtive approvals; with wild fears and inconsistent acts; and we, the people, say: give us a foreign policy that we can trust and upon which we can build toward the future...(W)e recognize that our own standard of living can be improved only by raising the standard of the other countries of the world...
>
> [These concerns] will certainly not interest those who regard the United States as a somewhat impoverished gold mine out of which they can still scrape a nugget or two for themselves. It will interest only those who think of the United States as their land--a land that they know and love--a land that became rich through the industry, thrift, and enterprise of its people, and will never regain its prosperity in any other way.[38]

The article was reprinted in the June 1940 **Reader's Digest**, but in the two weeks after the **Fortune** article was published, Willkie received 2,000 speaking invitations. His name began to appear in public-opinion polls on Republican preferences for presidential candidates. The article also caught the eye of Mike Cowles, who had not yet met Willkie. (In February and March 1940 articles in Cowles' **LOOK** magazine there was no mention of Willkie, even though one article dealt with dark-horse candidates and the other "Who'll be Nominated."[39]) Cowles wrote Willkie that the **Fortune** article "was the most sensible

statement I have seen anywhere of the issues facing America and of the problems which must be solved."[40]

On April 1, **The Des Moines Register** reprinted excerpts from the article on its editorial page. In an accompanying editorial, "Horse Sense In A/Political Statement," the paper noted that, while it was not hopping on any Willkie bandwagon, Willkie's arguments were sound and refreshing.[41]

Mike and John Cowles met Willkie Sunday, April 23, 1940, joining him for dinner at the Davenports when the brothers were in New York for the convention of the American Newspaper Publishers Association. The three had much in common, all of their public careers taking shape in the 1930s. Willkie was 48 years old; Mike 37 and John 41.[42] Their views on international affairs, race relations and civil rights were similar--all were considered "progressive" or "liberal" Republicans. The Cowles brothers talked to Willkie until about 3 a.m. Monday. Mike Cowles' recollection of the conversation suggests that they had to educate Willkie about political strategy, as Arthur Krock would two months later. Cowles said:

> Willkie expressed interest in running. He said that all he wanted to do was to get himself well known on the eastern seaboard, and, if there appeared to be a deadlock in the convention, he might be the darkhorse nominee.
>
> My brother John and I told him he was nuts. If none of the delegates knew him except those on the eastern seaboard, they would be afraid to go for him, a Wall Street tycoon, earning $100,000 a year as head of a utility company. Roosevelt was attacking hell out of utility companies.[43]

Willkie might have countered that his salary was $75,000, but the point was made. The Cowles brothers also reminded Willkie that his Republican credentials were not impeccable. In 1919, Willkie had toyed with the idea of being a Democratic candidate for the 8th Congressional District in Indiana;[44] after moving to Akron, Ohio, to practice law, he was a delegate to the 1924 Democratic national convention in support of Newton D. Baker, a pacifist who was Secretary of War under President Woodrow Wilson and a

staunch advocate of the League of Nations;[45] in 1932, then legal counsel for Commonwealth and Southern in New York, Willkie attended the Democratic convention in Chicago as an assistant floor manager for Baker.[46] Baker had grown more conservative in the years since 1924 but was still calling for U.S. international leadership. The Democrats nominated Roosevelt and Willkie supported him in 1932, contributing $150 to the campaign.[47] Finally, Willkie did not switch his voter registration from Democratic to Republican until late 1939 or early 1940. The switch was reported in the **New York Sun,** January 16, 1940.

Tryouts in Minneapolis and Des Moines

Given these political liabilities, the Cowles brothers urged Willkie to make a quick swing through the Midwest, to speak in Minneapolis and Des Moines, to court GOP faithful. As luck would have it, a Minnesota state Republican dinner was scheduled in Minneapolis in two weeks, May 11. John Cowles persuaded Gov. Harold Stassen, already chosen as the GOP national convention keynote speaker, to have Willkie as the May 11 featured speaker. Cowles bought time on six radio stations for broadcasting the speech. While the formal speech was "flat and unimpressive"--in Mike Cowles' words--Willkie's extemporaneous remarks following the broadcast excited the crowd.[48] At a post-dinner reception at John Cowles' home, Stassen told John he was shifting allegiance from Dewey to Willkie.[49] Willkie later would say that the reaction to his May 11 talk was the turning point in his thinking that he could win the GOP nomination,[50] which he won 48 days later.

In his privately published memoirs, **Mike Looks Back**, Mike Cowles recalled Willkie's May 16 speech before 3,500 Republicans in the KRNT Radio Theater in Des Moines:

> It was a repeat performance in Des Moines, only this time [at Mike Cowles' insistence] the speech was extemporaneous from beginning to end and I too had the Iowa delegates to my house to meet Willkie. He was as effective as he had been in Minnesota. Carried away by the

> enthusiastic reception in the two cities, he wanted to meet every damn delegate in the United States before they gathered in Philadelphia. He insisted that I accompany him on a barnstorming trip through the Midwest and mountain states. I knew most of the newspaper people in those states and was very helpful in setting up meetings and interviews.[51]

At the GOP convention, the Willkie candidacy was boosted by more than a million telegrams, letters and post card sent to the 1,000 delegates. John Cowles Jr. said that his "Uncle Mike" spoke with some pride of the role of the brothers in generating the telegram deluge.[52]

In one of several interviews with Professor J. Edward Gerald of the University of Minnesota, John Cowles Sr. told of similar involvement in the Willkie campaigns for the nomination and for the presidency, and he spent two months on the road with Willkie during the presidential campaign. In fact, John Cowles said that soon after Willkie received the nomination "Willkie asked him to be national chairman of the Republican party."[53] Cowles turned down that invitation partly because he and his brother were not strong political-party men, focusing their interests more on individual candidates.[54] Also, perhaps Cowles recognized more than Willkie the need for a professional politician in such a position.

John Cowles also told Professor Gerald that he drafted Willkie's comments to the convention when, after receiving the nomination, Willkie broke GOP tradition and went to the convention hall. Although news reports termed the speech extemporaneous, the 500-word text of the speech distributed by the Associated Press reflected some of John Cowles' impressions of Willkie including his claim that:

> I stand before you without a single pledge, promise or understanding of any kind except for the advancement of your cause and the preservation of American democracy.[55]

Cowles had been in Willkie's suite and had heard him turn down various bids for support in exchange for political favors.[56] The Cowles brothers also were part of the inner

circle that, while Willkie recuperated from the strain of his victory on the convention's sixth ballot, helped select Senator Charles McNary of Oregon as Willkie's running mate.

But these roles are part of a fabric pieced together by references to memoirs, interviews, and family recollections. In the weeks immediately following the Willkie nomination, the Cowles newspapers did not focus much on the roles of their publishers--perhaps, in part, because the family policy of not using the newspapers for self-aggrandizement was extended to the political process, too. This is an inviting area for further study.

Editors have one vote each

The political pundits who had said it would be easier for Wilikie to win the election than to win the GOP nomination were wrong. He did receive more popular votes than any other losing candidate up to that time, 22.3 million. He received 82 electoral votes from 10 states, mostly in the Midwest, including Iowa, but not Minnesota. Willkie did well with newspaper editorial endorsements in the two states, thanks, in part, to work by the Cowles brothers.[57] A survey of 28 of Minnesota's 33 daily newspapers found that 1 supported FDR, 3 were neutral and 24 endorsed Willkie; in Iowa, for 36 of 46 dailies, none supported FDR, 2 were neutral and 34 were for Willkie. On a total circulation basis, the support for Willkie was even stronger.[58]

But newspaper publishers, editors and editorial writers had one vote each. Mike Cowles summarized the reasons for Willkie's loss:

> His previous Democratic Party affiliation hurt him with Republicans and he did little to assuage these feelings...His Wall Street affiliation, meanwhile, hurt him with Democrats whom Willkie had hoped would desert Roosevelt over the third-term issue. Willkie did not have any special advantage on the issues. Though he advocated a better government environment for business investment, he supported most of the New Deal reforms. And he supported FDR's "short of war" stance, to give aid to the Allies but to stay out of the war.[59]

Given a choice between President Roosevelt and a Republican version of Roosevelt, voters opted for the incumbent. A desperate Willkie also had alienated some of his liberal support by caving-in to pressures from **Chicago Tribune** Publisher Colonel Robert McCormick and Scripps-Howard Publisher Roy Howard to tilt toward isolationism and to promise that he wouldn't send American boys abroad, though Roosevelt would.[60]

"Iron-willed" Willkie

The election chastened Willkie:

> [He] had lost the presidency, yet he remained a youthful and vital national figure. At the age of 48, his future could not have looked more promising. More than anything in his life, his lost presidential campaign would shape and strengthen his character and contribute to his growth as a public man...Gardner Cowles said Willkie had regretted bowing to expediency and became iron-willed in his determination to be absolutely forthright about every major political issue.[61]

Indeed, a recurring theme in the correspondence of John and Mike Cowles to Willkie in the next few years, as they supported his candidacy for the 1944 GOP nomination, was that Willkie should stop alienating the conservative wing of the party,[62] mend fences,[63] and build a broader base of support.[64]

What Mike Cowles likely had in mind in suggesting the phrase "iron-willed" were such things as Willkie's lukewarm endorsement of Dewey's successful 1942 candidacy for governor of New York and Willkie's comments to conservative St. Louis businessmen in October 1943:

> I don't know whether you're going to support me or not and I don't give a damn. You're a bunch of political liabilities who don't know what's going on anyway.[65]

Willkie further showed his iron will or stubbornness by being upset with supporters who switched to Dewey when Willkie's 1944 bid for the GOP presidential nomination failed. He refused to endorse Dewey's candidacy and died a month before the election without having made known his preference between FDR and Dewey.

The 1940 election defeat and Willkie's uncompromising nature, however, did not dampen the Cowles brothers' support. Their efforts to help him win the 1944 nomination stood in contrast to the fading support of **Time-Life** Publisher Henry Luce, who withdrew from an informal Willkie steering committee and was troubled by the 1940 setback and Willkie's like-it-or-lump-it approach to GOP politics.[66] Luce's loss of interest cast the Cowles brothers even more so as the major news media backers for Willkie. While they were involved for less than three months in his bid for the 1940 nomination, they worked for three years in the campaign for the 1944 presidential candidacy.

For example, in an effort to recapture the magic of the April 1940 **Fortune** article, **LOOK** gave its cover to Willkie and 11 pages to articles about him in its Oct. 5, 1943 edition. That spread included a three-page article by Willkie ("How the Republican Party Can Win in 1944"), four pages of family-album photos of Willkie, a page-and-a-half of laudatory assessments of Willkie by five foreign correspondents, and a two-and-a-half page piece by Roscoe Drummond of the **Christian Science Monitor** and Glen Perry of the **New York Sun,** dealing with the a hypothetical candidate the party would endorse--that candidate resembled Willkie.

In August 1943, Mike Cowles updated Willkie on plans for the October issue:

> [Editor] Harlan Logan has just sent me a copy of your LOOK manuscript. It seems to me excellent. I much appreciate your writing this.
>
> Harlan also sent me the proof of statements we have secured from [foreign correspondents] Leland Stowe, Ray Brock, Edmund Stevens, Larry Lesueur, and Maurice Hindus. They all gave you a great endorsement and I am convinced this feature will be very beneficial. When that issue goes on sale we are planning to run some newspaper advertising promoting it in New York, Chicago, Detroit, Washington, Boston, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Minneapolis and Des Moines. In the promotion we will feature your article and also the statements from the various foreign correspondents. This should focus more than the usual attention on their appearance in **LOOK**. I will also be glad, at our expense, to mail a marked copy of the issue to all of the Republican county chairmen throughout the United States, if that seems to you and [aides] Johnny Hanes and Ralph Cake to be wise. We can decide on that after all of you have had a chance to see an advance proof of the issue.[67]

(Other candidates were not ignored. The Dec. 14 **LOOK** carried a two-page article on the presidential prospects of Gen. Douglas MacArthur. The March 7, 1944, issue--a month before the Wisconsin primary--had Gov. Thomas Dewey, "Possible President," on the cover. Inside were 18 pages with features on governors: five pages to Dewey, a page summarizing gubernatorial opinions on current issues, two pages on governors of the South, two pages with pictures of all 48 governors, two-and-a-half pages on the 26 GOP governors, three pages on California's Earl Warren, one page on former Gov. Harold Stassen of Minnesota and even one-and-a-half pages on governors' favorite foods. Mike Cowles wrote to Willkie that the coverage was needed to balance the October 5 issue. After the GOP convention, **LOOK** carried a seven-page spread on Dewey on July 11 and put Mr. and Mrs. Dewey on the cover September 19 with a five-page article inside on "How to Elect a Republican President." The October 3 **LOOK** had FDR on the cover with a five-page article on "Roosevelt's 10 Biggest Decisions." And, perhaps to not offend anyone, the October 31 cover, the last before the 1944 election, featured comedian Bob Hope).

The brothers maintained a steady stream of correspondence, phone calls and visits, helping to chart Willkie's course toward the 1944 GOP nomination. While the Oct. 5 issue of **LOOK** was a heavy-handed effort on Willkie's behalf, a review of the Willkie-Cowles correspondence gives little or no hint that they would influence newspaper coverage on his behalf. At times each did advise Willkie on how to deal with reporters from his own newspaper, and once John Cowles persuaded an editorial page editor to draft a speech for Willkie. But those questionable practices are three instances alluded to in 65 letters. Further, there is a theme of openness in the correspondence--only two of the letters from John and Mike to Willkie suggest a measure of confidentiality. None is marked *confidential* . Two are "private," and they are both from John. One, of Feb. 11, 1943, expresses Cowles' concerns that some influential Britons are opposed to Willkie's candidacy in 1944; the other, Feb. 26, 1943, is marked private because John reports on a

conversation with Frank Knox, then publisher of the **Chicago Daily News,** but in service as Roosevelt's Secretary of the Navy. It deals with Knox's opposition to a fourth term for FDR and with Knox feeling he had been slighted by Willkie. Cowles advises Willkie:

> Without referring to me or the contents of this letter in any way, I urge you at the earliest convenient time when you are in Washington to call Frank at the Navy Department and say you want to see him. He will undoubtedly invite you to come to lunch in his office if you will phone him.
>
> If you will do this and will really warm Frank up, I think he will probably become an ardent booster for your nomination.[68]

So, the letters are generally open with no self-serving declarations of "Confidentiality" or "For Your Eyes Only" to suggest the advice they are giving Willkie is really important. The instances of advising Willkie on dealing with the press, and on recruiting a speech writer are worth reviewing, however.

Be sure to praise Stassen in Minneapolis

John Cowles had planned a trip out of town, so could not greet Mr. and Mrs. Willkie on a Feb. 18-19, 1944 visit to the Twin Cities. But in a three-page, single-spaced letter, Cowles reviewed plans for the visit and told Willkie what to say to the press. His letter may reflect some of the stress he felt on the advancing Wisconsin primary, crucial for Willkie to win:

> In your press conference, be sure to start right off by saying that you are happy to be back in Minnesota, because it is Harold Stassen's home state, and you have such a great admiration and affection for Harold.[69]

That Cowles thought highly of Stassen is clear from other correspondence. He knew that Willkie needed to be coaxed to say nice things about political rivals and that an expression of respect for Stassen was important if Willkie was to be the second choice of Stassen delegates at the GOP convention.

> Say that you have heard reports from Washington that Harold is making a magnificent war record as a Lt. Commander in the navy, and as Flag Secretary of Admiral Halsey's staff..[Stassen did have a good war record]...Make all of your references to Stassen enthusiastically affirmative and unqualified...Give the impression that in no sense are you coming into Minnesota in any way that is hostile to Stassen...If you speak highly of Stassen, without any qualifications, it will make it easier for us to get the delegates to switch to you.
>
> This applies to all the people you will be talking with in Minneapolis, except John Brandt, who is not keen about Stassen.[!]
>
> You might also tell the press conference what a fine senator Joe Ball is....[70]

Willkie's visit came on the heels of a visit by Vice President Henry Wallace, who was campaigning to remain FDR's running mate. The Feb. 19 **Minneapolis Tribune** carried a front page, three-column photo of Mr. and Mrs. Willkie arriving at the train station, with about 10 column-inches of a story on page one and 12 column-inches in the jump on page 4.

The lead said that the outcome of the 1944 election was up in the air, according to Willkie. Portions of the third and four paragraphs:

> He...refused to comment on his own chances of obtaining the nomination at the Republican convention.
>
> He declined likewise to discuss Minnesota political affairs pointing out he was a sincere admirer and close friend of former Gov. Harold E. Stassen...[71]

The story focused on criticisms of the FDR administration and of comments that Wallace had made about "discriminatory freight rates." Willkie said it was the Democrats who created such rates, and he wouldn't argue with Wallace "over his indictment of the administration." The penultimate paragraph of the story:

> Mr. and Mrs. Willkie spent the night at the home of Mr. and Mrs. John Cowles, close personal friends, although Mr. and Mrs. Cowles were out of the city.[72]

The Feb. 20 **Sunday Tribune** wrapped up the political events of the preceding week, including:

> Willkie carefully avoided any acts looking to support of the Minnesota delegation in the GOP national nominating convention out of deference to..Lt. Comm. Harold E. Stassen.[73]

And another Sunday story, "Liberal GOP Is/Willkie's Hope" noted:

> He advocated building the party up around the records of these men [GOP governors] and of the new forward-looking Republicans in Congress like Senator Joseph H. Ball of Minnesota...
> Willkie told again of his high regard for Lt. Comm. Harold E. Stassen..[74]

In the week following the Willkie visit, there was no editorial-page comment on Willkie's candidacy in the **Minneapolis Tribune,** although the paper on Feb. 23 did reprint a brief **Washington Post** editorial on Willkie's forthright nature.

So, of the approximately 40-45 column-inches of copy the **Minneapolis Tribune** gave to Willkie's visit, about four to five inches dealt with quotes recommended by John Cowles, and the overall tone of the stories was what Cowles had desired. ("Your Minneapolis visit was fine. You warmed up a lot of influential people who had been cool or hostile," he wrote to Willkie on Feb. 27.) While the first day's news story did have a paragraph pointing out the Willkie-Cowles ties, the episode illustrates conflicts between the role of publisher and political adviser. The advice from John Cowles was advice that any astute political adviser might have given. That it came to the news source from the publisher may cast a different light on it. (And, one wonders, What did Willkie say to Mr. Brandt, the sole Minnesotan not keen on Stassen? Because, Cowles' Feb. 27 letter also reported "You made an extremely favorable impression on John Brandt." So, Willkie apparently pleased both the Stassen people and the anti-Stassen person).

Advice from Mike

When he left Minneapolis, Willkie headed for Des Moines, perhaps re-reading the advice he had received from Mike Cowles:

> There will be a number of the reporters at the station when you arrive in Des Moines. I think you will need to talk with them a few minutes at the station, since at least the Iowa newspapers want some Iowa lead from you for their stories which appear Sunday morning. If they ask you whether you are seeking an instructed delegation [to the GOP convention] from Iowa, please answer along this line: "No, I am not

> seeking an instructed delegation. I naturally hope the Iowa delegation will conclude to vote for my nomination at the Chicago convention. I hope Iowa will pick the highest type of open-minded delegates who understand that the Republican party to win in November, and to deserve to win in November, must have a constructive, forward-looking program. If the Republican party has such a program and makes its campaign on that basis we can win nationally in November and break the vicious retarding influence of the New Deal on the welfare of our country."[75]

Reporters did meet Willkie at the train station. Mention of whether Willkie wanted an "instructed delegation" was somewhat buried in the 124 column-inches of news stories given to Willkie's Des Moines visit in the Feb. 20 and 21 issues of **The Des Moines Register.** Campaign manager Ralph Cake was quoted near the end of a 66 column-inch Sunday story:

> ... no attempt will be made by the Willkie organization to obtain an instructed delegation from Iowa for Willkie.
> "Rather," Cake said, we hope that we can contribute toward the selection of an open-minded, uninstructed delegation to the national convention made up of men and women who can participate unhampered in choosing the best possible nominee."

As in Minneapolis, the story noted that Willkie thought the GOP nomination was still a matter of guesswork, and it was reported that the Willkies visited at the hom.. of Gardner Cowles, Jr. But the Des Moines coverage about tripled the space in the Minneapolis Tribune and seemed more effusive.

The Sunday coverage began on an Iowa section page; the next day's coverage began on Page 1, under the headline: "Willkie Wins/More Friends,/In Iowa Visit." The stories were accompanied by 97 column-inches of photos. The lead stories were by C.C. Clifton, **The Register's** political reporter. He noted in the first three paragraphs on Sunday there would be nothing substantive in Willkie's visit, from a public viewpoint, because the purpose of the visit

> was to shake hands and exchange party welfare talk with the members of the Republican central committee and the chairmen of the 99 county organizations.[76]

After that information was conveyed, most of the rest of the coverage told how Willkie expressed his views "in his picturesque buoyancy," or was "intensely earnest," or used "trenchant words," and was enthusiastically received.

> Willkie was given a cordial and demonstratively approving reception by the party workers who know what makes the wheels go 'round and who showed conviction that Willkie has a grasp of their problems..
>
> Approving glances were exchanged by party chairmen and loud applause greeted Willkie when he made incisive summaries of his positions.
>
> You got the impression that Willkie, for the time being, was taking the role of attorney before the jury. But there were no tricks and no evasions on his part.[77]

The reporter's observations were supported with comments from GOP officials and newsmen traveling with Willkie, who talked of the excitement Willkie was generating. Clifton quoted Jack Steele of the **New York Herald Tribune**:

> Willkie has shown a real ability to go into a state where the Republican politicians are unfriendly and even hostile and win the unfriendly ones over almost to a support basis...I got the impression that a lot of that progress is going to stick. In two or three swings last year he didn't make nearly the impression that he has on this trip.[78]

The tone and extent of coverage continued into the next day when a side-bar story told of how Mr. and Mrs. Willkie shook hands with 2,500 Iowans at a reception. Such extensive coverage and wide use of photos were routine in **Register** news coverage, and judging from the turnout at the reception Willkie still was popular in Iowa. Whatever its source or justification, however, the news coverage seemed almost fawning. And if it suggested a Willkie boom, it was inaccurate, because about six weeks later, the Willkie campaign ended in Wisconsin. He did not win a single delegate and at first "flew into a violent rage" when Mike Cowles reminded him of his pledge to withdraw if he did not win a majority of the Wisconsin delegates.[79] Although the risks of running in the isolationist state of Wisconsin were well known, Willkie felt he had to confront the issue sooner or later to demonstrate that he could develop a broad base of support.

William Waymack writes a speech

Besides their February 1944 efforts to script Willkie's comments, there is one other curious episode culled from the study of 30 letters to Willkie from John and 35 to Willkie from Mike. That episode is odd in at least three ways:

(1) It involved John Cowles, the Minneapolis publisher, and William Waymack, editorial page editor of the Des Moines papers. Since his brother was in Washington, D.C., John sometimes oversaw both papers. And in March 1944, he asked--"pressured" might be a better word--Waymack, well versed on agriculture, to write a farm speech for Willkie. John's letter to Willkie's press secretary, Lem Jones,[80] notes in at least four different paragraphs that Waymack was not feeling well and really did not think he could write a speech, but that John was urging him to do so.

(2) The need for a farm speech is not clear. The Wisconsin primary was a month away, but Willkie's farm views were well reported in the March issue of **Successful Farming**, circulated in mid-February, and John already had told Willkie he had heard good responses to the article.[81]

(3). Waymack did send Willkie a speech, but it was about the need for businessmen to work to "win the peace." The first and concluding paragraphs suggest the tone of the article:

> This is addressed to the business men of America--the men that own and run enterprises big and small, the managers and executives that have the same interests and ideas, and in general the group that makes up the Chambers of Commerce and Associations or Manufacturers and Boards of Trade and so on.

And the concluding two paragraphs:

> Freedom for private enterprisers in the world of tomorrow is absolutely dependent on the preservation and expansion of freedom for all. In other words,. democracy. It is necessary to *keep democracy working*, in terms of its values to all groups.
>
> That is *one* of the conditions that "business" must comprehend, and never, never forget.[82]

Waymack's cover letter noted:

> As I told John Cowles, with whom I talked at more length when he phoned me about this, it was quite impossible to "refresh my memory" or add to my knowledge about farmer attitudes, in the time available. It was impossible to do a carefully specific job about a lot of "points". I doubted the wisdom of doing that anyhow...
>
> The stress that I put on the Peace objective represents my belief that the farm crowd, generally speaking, really is very receptive to that. Which is swell, as I see things.[83]

The "farm" speech is as loosely written as the excerpts suggest. Why was it so different from what one might expect, given the request from John Cowles? At first it seemed that somehow, in the filing of Willkie's papers, the "farm speech" was misplaced, and another mailing from Waymack was filed with his cover letter. But no other related material could be found in the Willkie files, and the content of the speech is not inconsistent with Waymack's letter. More likely, as he had said, Waymack was not feeling well, and he wrote something to satisfy Cowles. A highly unlikely explanation, given his regard for Willkie as reflected in their correspondence,[84] is that Waymack, as an act of defiance, sent Willkie an irrelevant speech. In any event, there is no evidence in the Willkie/Waymack/Cowles files at the Indiana University Lilly Library that Waymack's effort was used.

So, this exception to not using news-editorial personnel directly on Willkie's behalf was at best feeble, although perhaps not unprecedented. Lauren Soth, who joined the editorial page staff of the **Des Moines Register and Tribune** in 1947, about the time Waymack was leaving, said he had heard that Waymack had written "a speech or two" for Alf Landon's 1936 presidential campaign, presumably at the request of John or Mike Cowles. Soth was editorial page editor from 1954-1975 and said such requests were never made of him or his staff.[85] John Cowles' effort to press Waymack to send Willkie a speech may have resulted from the stress regarding the upcoming Wisconsin primary and a desire to not leave any stone unturned.

In addition to their roles as Willkie's advisers and campaign strategists, the Cowles brothers also were his traveling companions. They participated in the two most significant Willkie activities of the years between elections: John accompanied him on his trip to England, January 26-February 5, 1941, and Mike on his around-the-world trip, August 26-October 13, 1942. Both trips could be considered part of Willkie's campaign for the 1944 nomination since they supported his position as a leading spokesman for the GOP. The "One World" trip also sheds additional light on issues involving the Mike Cowles' potentially conflicting roles of publisher and Willkie confidant.

PART III Compatriots: Willkie, Mike Cowles and "One World"

The "One World" trip recommends itself for study for several reasons, including these four:

--The trip and Willkie's book, **One World** (Simon and Schuster, New York, 1943) are--next to his capture of the 1940 GOP nomination--the best remembered events and symbols of his public career.

--While both brothers were good friends of Willkie's, Mike Cowles' ties arguably were more personal than John's. Mike was the sole trustee of the One World Foundation, later the Wendell Willkie Foundation. As trustee, he had complete discretion--even in Willkie's lifetime--in spending proceeds from the sale of the book.[86] Cowles also was designated by Willkie to represent him in negotiations with Darryl F. Zanuck regarding a proposed film to be made about the "One World" trip. After Willkie's death, it was to Mike Cowles that both Willkie's widow and mistress turned for advice in establishing a memorial.[87] (The largest single memorial to Willkie was a joint gift of $100,000 from John and Mike Cowles to establish Willkie House, a black community center in Des Moines, a fitting tribute because of Willkie's concerns with civil rights and race relations--themes, too, of Cowles editorial policies.)

--The "One World" trip gave Mike Cowles access to three newsworthy stories, including two that were highly sensational. Not one of them was published or leaked to the news media, not even to his own paper.

--John Cowles' trip with Willkie will be studied at a later date. The readily available material on the "One World" trip makes that journey a pragmatic choice, too.

Suggested by the press

The Genesis of Willkie's 49-day and 31,000-mile trip around the world was a telegram he received June 24, 1942 from three foreign correspondents in Russia: Maurice

Hindus, special correspondent of the **New York Herald Tribune**, Eddy Gilmore of the Associated Press, and Ben Robertson representing New York's **PM:**

> VIEW SOVIETAMERICAN AGREEMENT AND GOOD YOU ACCOMPLISHED BRITISH VISIT WE EARNESTLY ADVISE YOUR COMING HERE STOP MOMENT OPPORTUNE GODWILL (Sic) TRIP YIELDING IMMEASURABLE BENEFITS BOTH COUNTRIES REGARDS[88]

To counter those who would give credit to President Roosevelt for arranging the trip, Willkie said:

> ...I planned the trip myself and secured the necessary consents. It was after the President asked me to do some special missions for him and the country.[89]

Three purposes

The One-World trip served at least three purposes: (1) The trip demonstrated the bi-partisan nature of the U.S. war effort, if any still neutral nations had questions about the U.S. commitment to defeat the Nazis and Japan; (2) the trip demonstrated U.S. control of the air lanes, or at least that a U.S. plane did not fear German or Japanese attack; (3) the trip met the interests of Wendell Willkie, who June 18 had said, "I doubt if I ever will aspire to public office again" and was at a low point in his public career--although few took him at his word.[90]

For his companions on the trip, Willkie chose Cowles and Joseph Barnes, a former foreign correspondent and later Willkie biographer. Both worked for the government in the Office of War Information. At the personal urging of President Roosevelt, Cowles joined the OWI in January 1942 as "Domestic Director," a position he held for two years.[91] Willkie, Cowles, Barnes and an Army Air Force crew of six made the trip on a four-engine Consolidated bomber, The Gulliver, converted for transport service.

The trip included visits to Cairo, Khartoum, El Alamein, and Alexandria in late August and early September; between Sept. 10 and 17, the tour visited Beirut, Jerusalem,

Baghdad and Teheran; from Sept. 18 through 28 they were in Russia, and Willkie first met with Stalin on the 23rd; they crossed into China Sept.29 and remained there until beginning a homeward journey, Oct. 9.

John Cowles was on hand to greet them when they landed in Minneapolis Oct. 13; Willkie reported to FDR on Oct. 14. On Monday, Oct. 26, Willkie made a half-hour "Report to the People" over all four major radio networks to an audience estimated at more than 36 million.[92] His book, **One World**, was published in April 1943 and by the end of the year had sold more than 2 million copies.[93]

News Coverage

From a news-coverage standpoint there were at least four major stories during the 49-day journey: (1) The nature of the trip and the bi-partisan statement it made about the U.S. war effort; (2) Willkie's visit with British General Bernard Montgomery on the eve of the Allies' victory over German General Erwin Rommel at El Alamein; (3) Willkie's visit to Russia--just as the Nazi forces at the siege of Stalingrad were nearing exhaustion--and his unequivocal call for the Allies to establish a second European front to relieve the forces of Josef Stalin; (4) Willkie's visit to China and his call there for an end to colonialism by all nations, including the U.S. and England.

During the trip, **The Des Moines Register** had at least one story on each of 29 days. Counting headlines and news stories, on 12 of those days total news coverage took less than six column-inches; on nine of those days a story or stories took 12-to-18 column-inches; and on eight days there was more than 18 column-inches of coverage. Cowles was mentioned in only four of the stories, usually in a paragraph towards the end, and identified as Domestic Director of OWI and twice as president of **The Des Moines Register and Tribune**. Such limited attention was consistent with Cowles' policy. In its nine days of coverage of the Willkie trip to England, for example, the **Minneapolis Tribune** carried no mention at all that Publisher John Cowles was there, too, although he had been mentioned in an advance story.

Kenneth MacDonald, whose 50 years with **The Register and Tribune** (1926-1976) included a variety of duties, including editor, editorial chairman, chief operating officer, and publisher, said there was a strong family policy against using the paper for self-promotion or aggrandizement.[94] Gardner Cowles, Sr., however, had advised the sons that any of their indiscretions or troubles would receive full attention in the papers. A policy that was tested, and verified, with the three divorces of Mike Cowles.

The Register's One-World coverage was measured against that in **The New York Times** for 10 days in September, encompassing all of the stay in Russia and the start of the visit to China. **The New York Times** gave about 190 column inches of headlines and stories to the Willkie tour, providing page 1 coverage on 6 of the 10 days. During the same time, **The Register** provided about 135 column inches, and the trip received page 1 treatment on 3 of the 10 days.

Uncovered news

The news coverage, however, did not deal with three happenings that directly involved Mike Cowles:

(1) A proposal to the Allies to agree to a plot for the assassination of French General Charles de Gaulle.

(2) The fact that Willkie never did deliver a hand-written letter that President Roosevelt had given him to give to Stalin.

(3) Willkie's affair with Madame Chiang Kai-shek, the wife of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek.

The de Gaulle Plot

Information on the de Gaulle episode is taken from pages 73-75 of Cowles' privately published memoirs, **Mike Looks Back,** and will not be further footnoted. In Beirut, Lebanon, Sept. 10, the Willkie party met General Georges Catroux, governor general of the French Middle-Eastern empire. Toward the end of a dinner party, Mrs. Catroux had the *maitre d'hotel* give Cowles her placecard with a note to meet him in the

garden immediately after dinner. She asked if he knew President Roosevelt and England's Winston Churchill (yes and no), and, in any event, could he get to see them on an important matter. He said he could. Cowles wrote of what happened next:

> She would arrange for an "accident" to happen to de Gaulle in Beirut. In return for removing this obstruction to the Allied war effort, she wanted assurance from both Roosevelt and Churchill that her husband...would lead the French troops when Paris was liberated from the Germans. After that triumphant moment, she said, her husband would be assured of playing a major role if not *the* major role in the new French government.
>
> I don't think her husband knew about the proposal, but it seemed quite clear to me that she was very serious. I repeated her proposal in English and my broken French over and over again to make absolutely sure that I had understood the shocking message correctly.

The next day, after listening to the story, Willkie thought for a time and said:

> "Mike, you never told me that story. If it ever gets out, I'll deny I ever heard it. When you get back to Washington, if you want to tell it to Roosevelt, you're on your own.

Cowles did relay the message to Roosevelt, who asked him not to repeat the story until the war was over, and Cowles agreed. Years later, he met Madame Catroux at a Paris dinner party and she said, "We have never met, have we, Mr. Cowles?" He responded, "No Madame Catroux, we have never met." "Thank you," she said.

The lost letter to Stalin

Prior to the trip, Cowles and Willkie met with Roosevelt at his Hyde Park, N.Y. home.

> We followed Roosevelt out of the dining room to his study. As he wheeled himself up to his desk, he looked up at Willkie and said, "Wendell, I'm going to give you a personal letter to Stalin. Why don't you and Mike make yourselves comfortable while I write it." [Thirty minutes later, after sealing the letter in an envelope, FDR told Willkie] "(T)his letter is to be handed by you to Stalin personally, and not to any aide no matter how important in the hierarchy." With repeated assurances by Wendell that he would follow the President's injunction...we bid the President good-bye.[95]

Apparently that was the last time any attention was paid to the letter until Willkie received a late night summons to meet with Stalin on September 23, and Cowles reminded him "don't forget the letter." "What letter?" Willkie asked. A search of all of Willkie's belongings yielded the letter, crumpled and in a dirty-laundry bag. The envelope was smoothed, and Willkie took it with him. It was not until they were on their way home that Cowles asked how Stalin had reacted to the letter.

> "My God, I forgot to give it to him!"[96]

The letter had a life of its own, however. Cowles heard later that the letter was in the hands of Irita Van Doren, but she died in 1966 and there was no indication of what happened to the letter. In advance stories of the trip, news stories noted the importance of Willkie's mission by reporting that he was carrying a personal letter from FDR to Stalin. In Willkie's wire-service obituary, it was dutifully reported that he hand carried a letter from FDR to Stalin, but it was not reported that the letter was never delivered.[97]

In **LOOK** magazine of Dec. 1, 1942, Willkie authored an article about the One-World trip, "What I Learned About The Nazis." On the table of contents page, a "Behind The Scenes" item noted that on his trip Willkie carried:

> ...confidential messages to Premier Stalin and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek.[98]

That was correct, as far as it went. The publisher knew better.

Willkie and Madame Chiang

This affair is recounted best by quoting from a draft of Cowles' memoirs. There is no substantive difference between the draft and the final printed version; the draft has a few more adjectives that apparently fell prey to an editor's pencil. Here is Cowles' account of his concern when Willkie and Madame Chiang Kai-shek left a Chungking reception early, and Cowles went back to his quarters "finding myself quite alone."

> I began to speculate about the disappearance, but wherever Wendell and the Madame had gone, it spelled trouble. About nine o'clock

I really began to worry. I told the servants to go ahead with dinner for one. Shortly after dinner there was a great clatter in the courtyard. In a minute the Generalissimo stormed in, furious. Three little body guards on each side, each little bodyguard carrying a little Tommy gun. Trying to restrain his rage, the Generalissimo bowed coldly and I returned the bow. The amenities over, he asked, "Where's Willkie?"...

The scenario unfolded like an old Mack Sennett comedy. The Generalissimo with me and the bodyguards in his wake, stormed through the house, looking for Willkie and the Madame. He searched every room, looking under beds and opening closets. Satisfied at last the that two were not in the house, he took his leave without a parting word.

Now I was really scared. I had visions of Wendell in front of a firing squad. So, I just sat up, drinking by myself, expecting the worst. At four o'clock in the morning, a very buoyant Willkie appeared, cocky as a young college student after a successful night with a girl. Then this irrepressible and irresistible man proceeded to give me a play by play account of what had happened between him and the Madame. He concluded blithely that he had invited the Madame to return to Washington with us. Then I blew my top. "Wendell, you're just a goddam fool!" I remonstrated.

I began to enumerate all the arguments against his mad behavior. First, I agreed wholeheartedly that Madame Chiang was one of the most beautiful, intelligent, and sexy women either of us had ever met. I could understand the tremendous attraction between these two charismatic people. But--there was already considerable gossip about them among the press corps in Chungking. To quash any wavering on his part I added a couple of irrefutable arguments. "You represent the President of the United States here. You want to be nominated again in '44 and you want to be elected President." I reminded him of the possibility that his wife and son would meet him at the airport in Washington and that the presence of the Madame would be an embarrassment. Willkie angrily stomped off to bed. I was pretty exhausted by then, and I retired, too.

I was up at about eight and found Willkie already having breakfast. We ate in silence. Finally I reminded him of a speech he had to make at nine o'clock. As he got up to leave, he turned to me and said, "Mike, you're to go see the Madame and tell her that she cannot fly back to Washington with us." "Where will I find her?" I asked. Sheepishly, he gave me the information. "She has an apartment on the top floor of the Women's and Children's Hospital here in town. It's her pet charity."

I subsequently found out that the Madame had her private secret service to protect her, quite apart from the Generalissimo's. Willkie and the Madame had gone to her apartment at the hospital the night before.[99]

When Cowles told Madame Chiang that he had vetoed the plans for her to return to the U.S., she "scratched her long fingernails down both my cheeks so deeply that I had marks for about a week."[100] They met again, about four months later when she was in New York on an official visit. Cowles' account of their after-dinner conversation

illustrates why it is difficult to separate a public figure's private indiscretions from his or her public responsibilities:

> She was convinced that Willkie could be nominated again for the presidency in 1944. It was my duty, she told me, to give up whatever I was doing and devote myself exclusively to getting him the 1944 Republican nomination. I was to spend whatever amount of money I thought was necessary. She would reimburse me for all expenditures..."You know, Mike, if Wendell could be elected, then he and I would rule the world. I would rule the Orient and Wendell would rule the Western world." And she stressed the word *rule*...I was so mesmerized by clearly one of the most formidable women of the time that this evening I would not have dismissed anything she said.[101]

Fabrication, but by whom?

Cowles' memoirs were published in 1985. In 1974, however, he had given a contradictory impression of the Chungking episode. He suggested that an account of the affair, published in **Drew Pearson Diaries, 1949-1959**, was "total fabrication." Pearson wrote, as edited by Tyler Abell:

> In China, Willkie spent some time at Chiang Kai-shek's headquarters in Chungking. He came back to Mike and Joe Barnes from an audience with Madame Chiang telling them that there was never anything like this before. It was the only time he said he had ever been in love. He said he was going to take Mme. Chiang back to the United States. At one time the Generalissimo came through their quarters with about sixty secret police looking for Willkie. The staff was alarmed but nothing happened.
>
> On the day they were to leave, they stopped to say good-bye to Mme. Chiang. Willkie went in. The door closed; they waited. They waited one hour and twenty minutes. She accompanied the party down to the plane and as he was about to get on the plane, she jumped into his arms. Willkie picked her up and gave her a terrific soul kiss. No wonder at one time the Generalissimo was looking for Willkie.[102]

Soon after the Pearson book was published, Cowles received a letter from Harold Riegelman of the New York law firm of Hess Segall Popkin Guterman Pelz & Steiner:

> Dear Mr. Cowles:
>
> I shall, if I may, call your secretary next week to request a few moments of your time. The subject concerns the Republic of China, of which I have been American legal advisor for many years.

> I am in friendly contact with the other parties to a troublesome issue, in an effort to arrive at at amicable solution. It relates to a passage in the Pearson Diaries.
>
> You have no material interest in that issue, but can, I think, be helpful with information likely to avoid a costly confrontation.
>
> I hope I may have the privilege of calling on you briefly.[103]

A handwritten note on the letter indicates that Riegelman and Cowles met in Cowles' office on May 1, 1974 at 3 p.m. In a letter to Riegelman dated that day Cowles said that Madame Chiang never accompanied them to the airport, and he terms some of Pearson's account "total fabrication."

> As we started out for the airport, Mr. Willkie said that he wanted to swing by the hospital to tell Madame Chiang goodbye...We arrived at the hospital between 10 a.m. and 12 noon. Mr. Willkie went inside. Doctor Kung and I stood on the steps of the hospital chatting. In about 30 minutes, Mr. Willkie re-appeared accompanied by Madame Chiang. She told Mr. Willkie goodbye and she told me goodbye. We then got in the car and she stood on the steps of the hospital and waved us goodbye.
>
> The statements in the Drew Pearson Diaries on page 388 saying that Madame Chiang accompanied Willkie to the airport and that they had an affectionate farewell scene are total fabrication...
>
> The statement also on page 388 saying that Mr. Willkie told me and Joe Barnes that he was in love with Madame Chiang is also total fabrication. Mr. Willkie never made to me any statement even resembling the statement attributed to him on page 388.[104]

Total fabrication? There apparently were errors in the Pearson account in terms of the number of body guards accompanying the Generalissimo in his search for Willkie and in the setting of the goodbye scene. Former **Register** editor Kenneth MacDonald, who said that Cowles talked about the Willkie-Madame Chiang affair upon his return to the U.S.,[105] noted that the Cowles' letter seemed to be drafted "by lawyers for lawyers."

For example, the Cowles' letter does not necessarily deny that Willkie had a lengthy goodbye with Madame Chiang. The letter gives the impression that Willkie was out of the hospital in 30 minutes, but read in another light it says that Willkie came out of the hospital 30 minutes after Cowles and Doctor Kung were standing on the steps chatting. Under that interpretation, Cowles, Barnes and others might have waited for Willkie, and, after a while, Cowles chatted with Doctor Kung and then, 30 minutes later, Willkie came out.

Likewise, Willkie might never have said he was literally "in love" with Madame Chiang. And there is no evidence in Cowles' recollection that Willkie made the sweeping statement that it was the "only time...he had ever been in love." His relations with his wife, Edith, and with Mrs. Van Doren were loving ones. Cowles might have fixed the "fabrication" label on such escape hatches and on whatever in his mind resembled a statement that one is "in love." Regardless, the Pearson account--with its inaccuracies--certainly is closer to what Cowles later acknowledged happened than his 1974 letter suggests in a normal reading.

Martha Stephens, Cowles' New York secretary from 1951 until his death in 1985, typed the letter to Riegelman. In a February 1988 interview, she said that she vaguely recalled the episode, but did remember that Cowles "framed the letter with care" and that "Mr. Cowles realized it was wise for him to deny the version that later appeared in his memoirs" out of concern for the privacy of Mrs. Willkie and Madame Chiang Kai-shek. There also were some concerns with libel ramifications, Ms. Stephens said. There appears to be no public repudiation by Cowles of the Pearson account; Riegelman could use the letter to "arrive at the amicable solution" he mentioned in his April 24 letter.

So, in two of the three newsworthy events, Mike Cowles did not share the information in a timely fashion, and he later gave the impression--to a limited audience--that the third event, the affair with Madame Chiang, never occurred.

Part IV Compatriots: Discussion, Conclusions, Further Research

Discussion: A Cowles tradition

Discussion of press and publisher behavior of 40 or 50 years ago often begins and ends with the caveat: Remember, things were different then. Indeed. Judging from press accounts, a crippled President Roosevelt never was in a wheelchair, and publishers and the press openly were wined and dined by interest groups that provided any number of "free rides" that are shunned today. Plainly, as evidenced by the news coverage of Willkie, a politician's private life was no one else's business, and the press had not yet been defined as "adversarial." Publishers routinely were handmaidens to the powerful or those wishing to be so. The behavior might be overt and obvious, as in the case of Col. McCormick shaping the news of **The Chicago Tribune**, or Henry Luce, providing his version of events in China through **Time** magazine, or as relatively indirect and subtle as John and Mike Cowles advising Wendell Willkie what questions to expect from their reporters.

One consistent theme through the era, however, was that the Cowles newspapers were thought to be good places to work. The editorial policies of the papers on international affairs and civil rights were ones that most reporters were comfortable with; the papers were said to be free of publisher and business influence.

Reflecting on his 50 years with **The Des Moines Register,** Kenneth MacDonald thought that if there was one single relationship that shaped or symbolized the publisher-reporter relationship it might have been that between founding editor Harvey Ingham and the paper's first front-page cartoonist, Jay N. (Ding) Darling.[106] Darling was more conservative than Ingham would have preferred, MacDonald said, but Ingham also recognized that if he'd likely lose Darling if he tried to censor or dictate cartoon topics. So Darling had a free hand, and **The Register's** tradition of front page cartoonist from Darling to Frank Miller to the current Brian Duffy might be considered a symbol of freedom from the publisher's influence.

The Cowles management had a tradition of distinguishing between the news side and the business side of a newspaper. Harvey Ingham and Gardner Cowles, Sr., complemented and respected one another, and had a "wonderful relationship,"said David Kruidenier, a grandson of Cowles, nephew of Mike and John, and the last Cowles publisher before **The Register** was sold to Gannett Company in 1985. "Harvey was more liberal than GC...Harvey was valued as an editor and grandfather as a businessman and manager," Kruidenier said.

Pointing to a framed statement of Harvey Ingham's principles for a newspaper, Kruidenier said of the Cowles' tradition, "We're talking 1902. It's bred into one. I come off this heritage." As a young child, Kruidenier said, like his uncles, he heard the lore of the newspapers, like how grandfather did not knuckle under to advertisers or to the liquor lobby when they tried to influence news coverage. "You understand that we're trying to run a balanced paper."[107]

Discussion: The Cowles brothers and Wendell Willkie

How well did the Cowles' traditions fare at the hands of John and Mike in their efforts to make Wendell Willkie president? A more focused study on newspaper content would provide some insight with regard to news coverage about Willkie, his GOP rivals and President Roosevelt, but that is not yet under way. As indicated by the coverage of Willkie's trip to England and the One-World journey, the tradition of not using the papers to publicize exploits and activities of the family was well-kept.

A **Register** editorial published the day after Mike Cowles' death said:

> ...Cowles maintained a tradition of journalistic freedom and integrity that made working for a Cowles property a coveted job among professionals. It was clear to newsroom employees that the boss's political views were not to affect news judgment, and journalists were never called off a story because of pressure from an advertiser or politician.[108]

The Cowles brothers might be faulted for 1940s behavior that was not in tune with standards of the 1980s. But the questions that this study raises--like scripting a Willkie press conference, trying to get a speech writer for him, and not disclosing newsworthy information--do not include calling a reporter off a story. The effusive story about Willkie's visit to Des Moines in February 1944 was written by Cy Clifton, the senior political writer, whose years with the paper began in 1921 when news and opinion were often mixed. The story might have been better edited or questioned for its slant if written by a younger reporter or one with less newsroom prestige.

Discussion: The newsroom knows the publisher's desires

When it comes to a publisher or business interests influencing the newsroom, however, a search for a "smoking gun" misses the point. Reporters know the priorities and prejudices of the newspaper or the publisher and may shape their news reporting accordingly.

MacDonald acknowledged this problem and said that one illustration that came to his mind was the work of Clifton in covering the state Legislature and, through his news stories, virtually lobbying for an improved highway system. Iowa's roads did need to be improved, but a good statewide system would also be a boon to a newspaper with state-wide circulation. Improving the road system was a priority of Gardner Cowles, Sr. "I don't think GC ever told Cy to do that in direct fashion," MacDonald said, but Clifton's stories helped the paper's circulation system in the "get Iowa out of the mud campaign" of 1928-1932.[109]

Newsroom perceptions of the publisher's priorities "always is a difficult issue," Kruidenier said, "particularly in smaller towns where there is not much community leadership" and the publisher gets very involved. "You just hope editors are aggressive enough...The public does expect more...(there are) far higher standards today." Some of the activities of his uncles, he said--such as the speech-writing request--"just wouldn't happen today."[110]

George Mills, an Iowa journalist for 60 years, said that awareness of the publisher's desires is inherent in the reporting process. In a book about Gardner Cowles Sr. and Harvey Ingham, Mills wrote:

> Though the Cowles papers stressed keeping their political preferences on the editorial page, that policy did not inhibit the Cowles sons' personal efforts on behalf of Willkie. It is conceivable that Willkie never would have received the 1940...nomination without the advice and strenuous efforts of John and Mike Cowles..(T)he Willkie-Cowles brothers story illustrates the papers' practice and policy versus its publisher's personal predilections. Reporters and editors could hardly fail to note the Cowles brothers' interest in Willkie, but the story was generally treated according to standard rules. Any Willkie story had to take its chances and be weighed for relative newsworthiness against competing stories on any news day.[111]

When reporters wrote about Cowles projects or favored topics, Mills said, there also was a "certain amount of strain to be sure they couldn't jump on you for ignoring the other guy."[112]

As an illustration of perceived pressure, however, Mills recounted an episode when Willkie came to Des Moines Feb. 23-24, 1942, at the request of Mike Cowles. Willkie came to help boost the political stock of Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mark Thornburg, who was seeking the GOP nomination for U.S. Senator, as was Gov. George Wilson. So, when Willkie was visiting in Thornburg's capitol office, Mills said, "I asked him why he was here and not seeing the governor." Mills was working for the Associated Press at the time, and said **Register** reporters appreciated him asking the question because they felt they couldn't or shouldn't.

Yet in a letter about the upcoming visit, Cowles had told Willkie:

> On the 24th, I will take you to the State House where you will meet Mark Thornburg, and where you can stop in for a moment to pay your respects to the Governor.[113]

Cowles recognized that Willkie had to see the governor, even though **The Register** reporters apparently assumed the governor was being slighted in deference to the boss's candidate.

Discussion: The One-World trip

On his trip with Willkie, Cowles wore at least four hats: He was a government official as domestic director of OWI; he was Willkie's friend; he was a campaign strategist and political supporter; he was a publisher. In his reactions to the three significant, but non-reported events of the trip, he was least of all a journalist/publisher.

His response to the suggested de Gaulle plot certainly was defensible under any of the four roles. The ethical question here may be not whether Cowles should have shared news of the plot with the news media, but whether and under what conditions one can ever share an invitation to a homicide.

His reluctance to disclose that the Stalin letter was not delivered can best be understood as an effort to not embarrass or harm in any way Willkie's political candidacy. Willkie's reputation came ahead of a good story. MacDonald himself wondered why Cowles had not leaked that story, even to his own paper.[114] Also, Cowles must have at least sanctioned the misleading editor's note in **LOOK** magazine that noted Willkie had carried a letter from FDR to Stalin, but did not mention the letter was never delivered.[115]

The Willkie-Madame Chiang affair apparently was viewed as one of those private indiscretions of public figures that the news media simply did not report, although, as Cowles noted, the Chungking press corps at least heard rumors about it.

But should not his spring 1943 meeting with Madame Chiang have put a different light on the affair--especially when she talked about ruling the Orient while "Wendell" ruled the West?

In the recent debate about news coverage of the private lives of public figures--spurred by the Gary Hart-Donna Rice affair[116]--Willkie's career of public service was cited as an example of a person whose contributions might have been lost had the media been as sensitive then, as they are now, to the private lives of public figures.[117]

If the Madame Chiang affair suggests anything, however, it is that Willkie can be used on both sides of the debate about news coverage of private lives. Should the nation's

foreign policy have been at the risk of "President" Willkie's libido? Given his support for Willkie and the fact that he, too, was quite taken with Madame Chiang, perhaps that question did not occur to Cowles. But it is relevant to the debate about private lives of pubic figures.

Compatriots: Conclusions

(1) Willkie's relatively brief public career--only about four years from April 1940 to October 1944--is a ripe area for journalism research. Events linked to his career provide another context for considering contemporary problems and issues. The impact of the print media in the 1940s presidential selection process--in Willkie's case primarily magazines--appears to have been as important as television today. Print could reach a target audience as Mike Cowles sought to do in sending the Oct. 5, 1943 issue of **LOOK** to Republican county chairmen. The involvement of the news media in public affairs was as direct then as today, an example being that the significant One World trip resulted from an invitation from three foreign correspondents.

(2) The involvement of the press in Willkie's career and the deference of reporters to him differs, if at all, more in degree than in kind from today's relationships. If Arthur Krock, Marquis Childs and others advised Willkie, their involvement does not seem markedly different from today's journalists who move in and out of government positions or give debate advice to presidential candidates. A significant difference between the journalism of the 1940s and the journalism of the 1980s is the degree of introspection that exists today. Reporters and publishers are more likely to question themselves and their peers as to appropriate news source-news reporter relationships. Introspection may be a matter of overkill in the 1980s; it was not on the agenda in the 1940s.

(3) Given the 1940s context, the Cowles' reputation for unfettered newsrooms seemed deserved. Publishers did have their favorites, but the word "balance" rather than objectivity or impartiality seems to be a good way to describe how the Cowles newspapers earned a measure of respect. The Cowles brothers did stage news events on Willkie's

behalf--the 1940 and 1944 visits of Willkie to Minneapolis and Des Moines, for example--and further research should compare the coverage given to Willkie to that given rival candidates in similar events. Also, while the Cowles family might be applauded for not using the newspapers for self-aggrandizement, that policy might have been carried too far by the limited news coverage given to the roles of the brothers in the Willkie campaign.

(4) A reputation for newsroom independence may be hard to lose. If Harvey Ingham and Gardner Cowles, Sr., established a policy of a hands-off newsroom, that policy likely attracted reporters and editors who savored such an environment and took pride in it, reinforcing the tradition. That may explain why it may be easier to improve a newspaper's reputation--the **Los Angeles Times** and **Chicago Tribune** come to mind--than it might be to tarnish a reputation.

(5) Mike Cowles dealt with conflict-of-interest questions with respect to Cowles newspapers in at least three ways: (1) He did not dictate or kill news stories; (2) but he also did not share newsworthy information that might harmful to Willkie, and (3) during the Willkie era, he stopped being a journalist or being directly involved in the newspaper. After his service in the Office of War Information, he moved to New York in 1945, and did not exercise absentee ownership. Kenneth MacDonald said that occasional phone calls and notes from Cowles would question or suggest news coverage, but that Cowles deferred to Des Moines newsroom judgments.[118] (MacDonald's perceptions are persuasive in that he directed Register news operations for 40 of his 50 years with the company, and was a widely and deeply respected journalist). One illustration of Cowles-no-longer-the-journalist involved the lost letter to Stalin. Even given the supposed emphasis on the letter, he did not ask Willkie about it until several days after Willkie had met with Stalin. This study's brief consideration of **LOOK**, however, plainly suggests that Mike Cowles' influence on behalf of Willkie was more direct. On Cowles' behalf, it should be noted that his dedication to Willkie did not blind him to principle or to common sense. He vetoed

Willkie's plan to have Madame Chiang return to the U.S. with them, and he held Willkie to his promise to leave the 1944 GOP nominating race if he lost the Wisconsin primary.

(6) John Cowles' relations with Willkie were different from his brother's. His letters to Willkie, for example, often were two or three pages single-spaced, or, in one case, 11 pages hand-written.[119] He offered political advice and philosophy, whereas his brother's letters were task-oriented: write to this person, make this point, etc. That, apparently, was John's nature. "He was more the teacher," said nephew David Kruidenier. Also, his more immediate contacts with Harold Stassen cast his relationship in ways more related to intra-party politics. John Cowles' relationships can be better understood when there is access to more of his personal papers. The papers currently available suggest that John--like his brother--never ordered a story on Willkie to be published or to be killed. The papers do suggest that John's political advice was more restrained than his brother's. For example, in a March 30, 1943 letter, a **LOOK** executive, James Milloy, forwarded to Mike Cowles a letter suggesting how Willkie could almost steal the nomination with a carefully contrived speech. The letter begins:

> Because of the nature of this letter I am sending it to your house where you can consign it to the fireplace after reading.[120]

Milloy's plan was for Willkie to give a speech at a dinner for new GOP Congressmen. The announced topic of the speech would be on international affairs--to throw the Democrats off--but Willkie would instead deliver a "two-fisted" speech attacking Roosevelt. Mike forwarded the letter to Willkie with a "makes a lot of sense to me" note;[121] John was leery of earlier advice Milloy had given and at that time urged Willkie to be cautious because Milloy was "too partisan in his approach."[122]

(7) Even in its 1940 context, the way the press ignored Willkie's private life is open to question. Perhaps that criticism is through glasses of the 1980s, but the Madame Chiang affair is almost as troubling--in its lack of media attention--as it is fascinating, given what it

suggests about Willkie's judgment and Madame Chiang's ambition. Such lack of news coverage may be a more deserving target for criticism than excessive coverage.

Conclusions: Further research

(1) Already indicated above is the opportunity for further research into John Cowles' trip to England with Willkie in 1941, a closer study of **LOOK** magazine's coverage of Willkie and other political figures, and detailed content analysis of the Des Moines and Minneapolis Cowles papers during the Willkie years. Incorporated in such a study should be consideration of Willkie coverage by the **Chicago Tribune. The Tribune** opposed Willkie and **The Register's** Republican philosophy. No love was lost between the two. When Secretary of Agriculture Thornburg lost the Iowa GOP U.S. Senate primary to Gov. Wilson, **The Register** reported:

> The isolationist Chicago Tribune, which Tuesday interpreted the result of the Republican primary in Iowa as a rebuff to "New York Communists," Wednesday published an editorial branding Mark Thornburg...along with Wendell Willkie as "no kind of Republican at all."[123]

(2) Kruidenier's brief comments about learning to be a publisher are interesting and suggest value in studying the sociology of media families, at least what few remain. It is intriguing that just as some children are reared to be too proud to ever accept welfare, so more fortunate ones are also reared to learn that a family member does not knuckle under to the pressure of advertisers. There's an inviting contrast to be made between how children in a publisher's family are reared and how publishers may be educated today in moving from one chain paper to another. That contrast needs to consider, too, the role of family wealth in freeing publishers from short-term economic consequences of ethical decisions.

(3) The correspondence between newspaper reporters, columnists, other journalists and public figures is an inviting area of study. The Cowles-Willkie correspondence, for example, suggests there is rich information to mine in Presidential libraries--tracing the

correspondence of Walter Lippmann with various presidents, for example, or comparing the content of the correspondence with news coverage of the time.

The lesson of this brief survey of the relationships between Willkie, the press and the Cowles brothers is that such research can be enjoyable for the author and, likely, of more than passing interest for the reader.

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1. Marquis Childs to Wendell L. Willkie, Esq., Nov. 21, 1942, from the Manuscripts Department, Lilly Library, Indiana University.
2. Drew Pearson to Mr. Wendell Willkie, July 15, 1943, Lilly Library.
3. Steve Neal, **Dark Horse** (Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, N.Y.), 1984
4. Pearson, *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. Arthur Krock, **Memoirs, Sixty Years on the Firing Line;** Turner Catledge, **My Life and the Times**.
7. Krock, *op. cit.* (Popular Library Eagle Books Edition, New York, 1968), pp. 184-185.
8. Krock, "The Campaign Won't Be All/Beer and Skittles," **New York Times,** July 2, 1940, 20:5.
9. Arthur Krock to Wendell L. Willkie Esq ("Dear Wendell"), Sunday, Feb. 9, 1941, on the stationery of **The New York Times** Washington Bureau. Lilly Library
10. *Ibid.*
11. The Associated Press, "Formal Statement Made by Willkie to Senate Committee," **New York Times,** Feb. 12, 1941, p. 5.
12. Neal, *op. cit.*, p. 314.
13. Paul Smith, editor of the **San Francisco Chronicle**, was on military duty with the United States Marine Corps in the Pacific. He had written a touching letter to Willkie Oct. 20, 1943, telling of his readiness for military combat, but noting "You know I am with you all the way and look forward to the day when I might be a more effective member of the team."
14. Wendell L. Willkie to "Mike" Cowles, June 14, 1944, Lilly Library.
15. Roscoe Drummond to Mr. Wendell Willkie, June 14, 1944, Lilly Library, on stationery of the Washington News Bureau of **The Christian Science Monitor.**
16. To Wendell L. Willkie, Sept. 4, 1943. One other signer is Dewey Fleming, Lilly Library.
17. Joseph Barnes, **Willkie** (Simon and Schuster, New York, 1952), pp. 232-233.
18. Ellsworth Barnard, **Wendell Willkie, Fighter for Freedom** (Northern Michigan University Press, Marquette, Mich., 1966), pp. 164-165.
19. Neal, *op. cit.*, p. 185.
20. Neal, *op. cit.* p. 321.
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 321-323
22. "Willkie Left Text Behind; /Friend Rushes it to Him," **New York Times**, Aug. 18, 1940, 33:7.
23. Barnard, *op. cit.*, p. 237

24. Biographer Neal notes: "Willkie was so disorganized that it was surprising it had taken this long for him to lose some of his diplomatic portfolio," *op. cit*, p. 243.
25. Correspondence of Oct, 19, 1942, Gardner (Mike) Cowles file, Lilly Library.
26. John Cowles to Wendell Willkie, Jan. 29, 1944, Lilly Library.
27. Neal, *op. cit.*, p. 38.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 186
29. Walter Kiernan, International News Service, biographical sketch found in Willkie file in the **Des Moines Register** library. Release date: July 6, 1940.
30. Interview, Jan. 15, 1988.
31. Barnes, op. cit., p. 322.
32. Wendell Willkie to Raymond Buell, Dec. 11, 1941, Lilly Library.
33. John Cowles to Wendell Willkie, Dec. 3, 1941, Lilly Library.
34. David Halberstam, **The Powers That Be**,(Dell Publishing Co., New York, 1980),p. 89.
35. For example, Arthur Krock called him "the darkest horse in the stable" in a Feb. 23, 1939 column, and columnist David Lawrence on May 22, 1939 wrote that Willkie met the GOP desires for "confidence and fair dealing in the government's relations with business."Barnes, *op. cit.*, p. 157
36. Neal, *op. cit.*, p. 36.
37. W.A. Swanberg, **Luce and His Empire** (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1972), p.170
38. Wendell L. Willkie, "We, the People, A foundation for a political platform for recovery," **Fortune,** April 1940, pp. 64-65, 162, 164, 168-173.
39. Drew Pearson and Robert H. Allen, "The Republican Dark Horse," featured U.S. Supreme Court Justice Owen J. Roberts in the Feb. 27, 1940 issue of **Look**, and "Who'll be Nominated" in the March 26 issue named only Thomas Dewey, Robert Taft, Styles Bridges and Arthur Vandenberg.
40. Neal, op. cit., p. 68
41. "A Big Business Man Advocates/A Businesslike Foreign Policy," **Des Moines Register**, Monday, April 1, 1940, p. 4.
42. John Cowles, born Dec. 14, 1898, died Feb. 26, 1983, at the age of 84; Mike, born January 31, 1903, died July 8, 1985, at the age of 82. Willkie was born Feb. 18, 1892 and died Oct. 8, 1944.
43. George Mills, **Harvey Ingham and Gardner Cowles, Sr.: Things just don't happen,** (Iowa State University Press, Ames, 1977), pp. 104-105. A similar quotation is found in Neal's biography, based on a 1978 interview with Mike Cowles: "My brother and I said to Willkie that he was nuts," p. 72.
44. Barnes, *op.cit.*, pp. 31-32.
45. Barnard, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-65.
46. It is at least curious that Willkie could have been a delegate to two national political conventions and an "assistant floor manager" at one and yet have appeared so ignorant about political strategy as he did in his June 1940 meeting with Arthur Krock and the April 1940 meeting with the Cowles brothers. Krock wrote of Willkie's naivete, "If it's an act, it's a good one." (Krock, *op. cit.*). Such an "act," however, would be contrary to Willkie's personality and general behavior. Given his general disorganization and his roving eye, it's not unlikely that even if he was involved in the 1924 and 1932 conventions he might not have learned much about convention details and strategy.

47. Neal, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
48. Gardner Cowles, **Mike Looks Back**, privately published memoirs, p. 67.
49. Neal, *op. cit.*, 73.
50. Neal, *ibid.*, Barnard, op. cit., p. 160, Barnes, *op. cit.*, p. 167.
51. Gardner Cowles, *op. cit.*
52. Interview with John Cowles, Jr., May 10, 1988.
53. Undated interview notes provided by Professor Gerald in correspondence of May 1988. The graciousness of Dr. Gerald in providing these notes is deeply appreciated.
54. Observations made by Kenneth MacDonald in a May 5, 1988 interview and John Cowles Jr. in a May 10, 1988 interview.
55. "Text of Willkie Talk," Associated Press, **The Des Moines Register**, June 29, 1940, p. 11.
56. Neal, *op. cit.*, p. 113.
57. The brothers routinely wrote to Willkie suggesting letters to various editors and civic leaders; Mike Cowles sent drafts of letters that Willkie's office used. In the letters, typically, Willkie would note that he was writing at the suggestion of John or Mike Cowles.
58. Edward N. Doan, "Willkie Received Unparalleled Newspaper Circulation Support," **Journalism Quarterly,** Vo. 18, No. 2, June 1941, pp. 137-145.
59. *Ibid.*
60. Neal, *op. cit.*, pp. 158-159.
61. Neal, *op cit.*, p. 181.
62. For example: John Cowles letter of Sept. 8, 1943 and Mike Cowles letters of Jan. 15 and 21, 1944. Lilly Library.
63. For example:John Cowles letters of Feb. 11, 1943 and Jan. 25, 1944, and Mike Cowles letters of Sept. 24, 1943 and Feb. 18, 1944. Lilly Library.
64. For example: John Cowles telegram of Oct. 7, 1943, and letters of Nov. 24, 1941 and Feb. 27, 1944, and Mike Cowles letter of Sept. 1, 1943. Lilly Library.
65. Barnes, *op. cit.*, p. 342.
66. John Cowles discusses Luce's reluctance and the need to keep him involved in a letter to Sinclair Weeks, Dec. 21, 1943. Lilly Library.
67. Mike Cowles to Wendell Willkie, Aug. 16, 1943. Lilly Library.
68. John Cowles to Wendell Willkie, February 26, 1943.
69. John Cowles to Wendell Willkie, Jan. 29, 1944.
70. *Ibid.*
71. Earl Almquist, "Election Outcome Anybody's/Guess, Willkie Declares Here," **Minneapolis Tribune**, Feb. 19, 1944, Pages 1,10.
72. *Ibid.*
73. M.W. Halloran, "Willkie's Visit/Caps Busy Week," **Minneapolis Sunday Tribune**, Feb. 20, 1944, pp. 1, 4.
74. "Liberal GOP Is/Willkie's Hope,"**Minneapolis Sunday Tribune,** p. 4
75. Mike Cowles to Wendell Willkie, Feb. 18, 1944.
76. "Willkie Here For GOP Talks," (seven columns) Outlines His/Philosophy To/Party Chiefs," one column, **Des Moines Register**, Sunday, Feb. 20, 1988, Iowa news section, pp. 1 and 2.
77. *Ibid,* p. 2.

78. *Ibid.*
79. Neal, *op. cit.* p. 305
80. John Cowles to Lem Jones, March 2, 1944.
81. John Cowles to Wendell Willkie, Feb. 27, 1944.
82. William Waymack, "The Stake of Business" in Winning the Peace," sent to Wendell Willkie with letter of March 8, 1944.
83. Waymack to Wendell Willkie, March 8, 1944.
84. Wendell Willkie to W.W. Waymack, Nov. 28, 1940; Waymack to Willkie, Dec. 2, 1940; Waymack to Willkie, Sept. 15, 1941, among others.
85. March 2, 1988, interview with Lauren Soth. Waymack is deceased.
86. In a March 8, 1944 letter to Mike Cowles, Willkie affirms that "as trustee, you have full discretion..." in spending trust funds.
87. For example, letters to Mike Cowles from Irita Van Doren, Oct. 22, 1944, Oct. 26, 1944, and Feb. 13, 1945, and letter from Mike Cowles to Edith Willkie, Nov. 1, 1944. Cowles Library, Drake University.
88. Eddy Gillmore had covered Willkie's visit to England with John Cowles in 1941.
89. Wendell Willkie to Robert F. de Graff of Pocket Books, Inc., Aug. 18, 1943, Lilly Library.
90. Neal, *op. cit.*, p. 227.
91. Cowles, **Mike Looks Back**, op. cit., pp. 68-69.
92. Neal, *op. cit.*, p. 260
93. *Ibid.*, p. 264
94. Interview, Nov. 17, 1987
95. Cowles, *op. cit.*, p. 71
96. Cowles, *op. cit,* pp. 81, 83. Neal, *op. cit.*, 246
97. The Associated Press reported that Willkie "carried letters [from FDR] to Marshal Josef Stalin and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek." **Des Moines Register**, Oct. 9, 1944, p. 3.
98. **LOOK**, Vol. 6, No. 4, p. 4.
99. From a draft of **Mike Looks Back**, Gardner Cowles papers, Drake University Cowles Library.
100. Cowles, **Mike Looks Back**, op. cit., p. 89
101. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
102. Drew Pearson, **Drew Pearson Diaries, 1949-1959,** edited by Tyler Abell (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, New York, 1974), pp. 387-388). The One World Trip was in 1942, but shows up in a 1957 diary entry because Pearson had been reminiscing with Phil Graham of the **Washington Post** about World War II days. This section of the book includes one of the first reports about the letter to Stalin not being delivered.
103. Harold Riegelman to Mr. Gardner Cowles, April 24, 1972. Cowles Library, Drake University.
104. Gardner Cowles to Harold Riegelman, May 1, 1974, Cowles Library, Drake University.
105. Interview with Ken MacDonald, Nov. 17, 1987.
106. *Ibid.* Darling spent most of his 49 years as a cartoonist, 1902-1950, at the **Des Moines Register and Tribune.**
107. Interview with David Kruidenier, Jan. 20, 1988.
108. "Mike Cowles' great legacy," **Des Moines Register**, July 10, 1985.

109. MacDonald interview, Nov. 17, 1987
110. Interview with David Kruidenier, Jan. 20, 1988.
111. Mills, *op. cit.*, p. 104.
112. George Mills, interview, January 15, 1988.
113. Mike Cowles to Wendell Willkie, Feb. 4, 1942.
114. MacDonald interview, Nov. 17, 1987.
115. See footnote 98.
116. Willkie shared another fate with Hart. Willkie's given name was Lewis Wendell Willkie; the first and middle names were transposed by the U.S. Army when Willkie was inducted for World War I. He liked the change. (Hart's last name was Hartpence)
117. William J. vanden Heuvel, "In Praise of Wendell Willkie, a 'Womanizer,'" **The New York Times**, Dec. 19, 1987, p. Y7
118. MacDonald, *op. cit.*
119. John Cowles to Wendell Willkie, Jan. 24, 1943.
120. James Milloy to Gardner Cowles, Jr., March 30, 1943.
121. Mike Cowles to Wendell Willkie, March 31, 1943.
122. John Cowles to Wendell Willkie, Jan. 20, 1943.
123. "Chicago Tribune/Hits Thornburg" Des Moines **Register**, June 5, 1942.